وبالتالي أصبحت تسند إلى هذه المجموعة العرقية الأعمال الحقيرة التي يترفع عنها البيض كما أصبحوا يتعرضون لشتى ألوان الاستغلال.

تتبنى كينجستون في تصحيحها لهذه المفاهيم أسلوبي المراجعة الثقافية والتاريخية. الأسلوب الأول وهو المراجعة الثقافية تتعمد فيه الكاتبة إعادة صياغة الأساطير الصينية القديمة والشهيرة لكي تضمنها إسقاطات عن الولايات المتحدة وعما حدث للصينيين الأوائل عندما هاجروا إلى الولايات المتحدة. وقد تعرضت الكاتبة لهجوم ضار لقيامها بتغيير الأساطير على اعتبار أن هذا يعد نوعًا من العبث بالتراث. ولكن الكاتبة ردت على هذا الاعتراض بأن الأساطير لابد أن تتطور وتتغير كما تغير المهاجرون الصينيون عند قدومهم إلى الولايات المتحدة، فالأساطير هي الأخرى قد أصبحت أمريكية.

أما أسلوب المراجعة التاريخية فيتضمن تغيير كل من الأساليب والموضوعات التي يستخدمها التاريخ الرسمي. فبينما يعنى التاريخ الرسمي بالابتعاد عن الخيال والكتابة الأدبية، تقوم الكاتبة بدمج للاثنين معا. كذلك بينما يهتم التاريخ الرسمي بالأحداث العامة والشخصيات المهمة في تاريخ الأمة، تركز كينجستون على التاريخ الشخصي لجدودها وأفراد أسرتها والذين يمثلون في الواقع الآلاف من المهاجرين.

من خلال هذين الأسلوبين تنجح الكاتبة في جعل القارئ يعيد التفكير فيما تعلمه من التاريخ الرسمي الأمريكي ليكتشف أن التاريخ في واقع الأمر ما هو إلا عمل انتقائي يقوم باختيار الموضوعات والشخصيات التي يريد عرضها وتمثيلها. وبالتالي فمن الممكن بل ومن الواجب إعادة كتابة التاريخ ليعكس رؤية أكثر إنصافا لكل فئات المجتمع الأمريكي .



"رجال الصين"
تجربة في المراجعة الثقافية والتاريخية

د. مها حسان (*)

تسعى الكاتبة الأمريكية من أصل صيني ماكسين هونج كينجستون في روايتها "رجال الصين" إلي تصحيح المفاهيم الخاطئة التي روج لها البيض في التاريخ الرسمي للولايات المتحدة الأمريكية والتي تذهب إلي أن الأوروبيين البيض هم من قامت على أكتافهم الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية وأن الأمريكيين الذين ينحدرون من أصول أخرى لم يلعبوا أي دور يذكر في هذه المهمة. تخالف الكاتبة هذا الاعتقاد السائد الذي ينطوي على مغالطه كبرى حيث أن الأمريكيين من أصول وجنسيات أخرى كانت لهم إسهامات جليلة الشأن في بناء الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية . في البداية تكشف كينجستون التنميط الخاطئ الذي حدث لشخصية الرجل الصيني فتوضح أن البيض تصوروا أو صوروا لأنفسهم أن الصيني يفتقر إلى مقومات الرجولة وأنه بشكل ما مخنث أو ضعيف . ويرجع النقاد هذا التنميط على سبيل الاحتمال إلى أن الصينيين عندما حلوا في الولايات المتحدة كانوا كثيرا ما يقومون بأعمال عادة ما تضطلع بها النساء مثل العمل كخدم في المنازل أو ما شابه وأن هذا ربما أدى إلى تكوين هذه الفكرة عنهم. بالإضافة إلى هذا خضع الصينيون لما يمكن أن نسميه بالتغريب، أي أنهم صنفوا على أنهم غرباء عن المجتمع أو أجانب.

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issues enables readers to admit that there are unacknowledged presences and buried cultural facts in American history. Hence a mythic history written by a writer like Kingston can be equally true to, if not truer than official versions.

To sum up, *China Men* was written as a testimonial to the Chinese Americans' participation in American history. In it the stereotypes and misconceptions about Chinese Americans are rectified through a process of cultural and historical revision. The book successfully argues for a new perception of American history that would incorporate the contribution of non-Anglos, thus making for a more inclusive definition of Americanness.

father, enraged, kicks the door. The incident is recounted only to have the narrator tell us:

> Only, my sister remembers that it was she who watched my father's shoe against the door and the mirror outside fall, and I who was beaten ... Neither of us has a recollection of curling up inside that room, whether behind the pounding door or under the bed or in the closet (253).

The two memories cancel out each other. Each claims to be true yet both obviously cannot. This forces us to question memory; not just personal memory but also national memory. We also question the notion of truth; whether there is only one truth or many truths? Or, in fact, if there is anything that merits to be called truth. Li rightly avers that: "the representation of history is always wrought under processes of secretive retention and vision, for discovery is never made in a neutral ideological zone" (495.) Such a perspective leads the reader to contemplate the nature of historiography and its limitations. It determines who and what deserves to enter history. Being conscious of such

Chinese immigrants. The forgotten details which the narrative provides unsettle the Euro-centric views of American history. The stories she offers evidently transcend any family history since she has more grandfathers, uncles, and great uncles than anyone realistically could. They, in fact, constitute a counternarrative that portrays American history not just "as a glorious expanionist epic but as a systematic exploitation of the ethnic minority whose contribution has been appropriated but legal status rejected"(Li 492).

The issue of memory cannot be elided in historical revision because memory plays a key role in retrieving the past. Therefore, to unsettle traditional conceptions about history, Kingston emphasizes the unreliability and fallibility of memory. She seems to be arguing that if memory which is our main tool for recapturing the past can be elusive and unreliable, then it is not prudent to have complete faith in any single version of the past. This idea is suggested when the narrator recounts a childhood recollection of a family row during which her sister hides in a bedroom, while the

China Men dispersed. It was dangerous to stay. The Driving Out had begun. Ah Goong does not appear in railroad photographs"(145). Instead, the white overseers are the ones to appear in the photograph. Thus the photograph emphasizes the claims of official history that white Americans are the ones who built America. The photograph is thus seen not as incontrovertible evidence, but as politically suspect. It is not transparently referential as is generally assumed. Its use depends on the intentions of the user. This view is confirmed by Linda Hutcheon who affirms that:

> Photography may legitmize and normalize existing power relations, but it can also be used against itself to 'de-doxify' that authority and power and to reveal how its representational strategies may construct an imaginary economy that might usefully be deconstructed (qtd. in Wang 93).

By juxtaposing the China narrative of Ah Goong to the photograph, Kingston divulges the falsehoods of official history and documents the uncredited contribution of

they masquerade as objective … [they] are not necessarily more true or real than the Grandfathers' story" (Leilani 73-4). The documents are "available in an already interpreted form and … do not provide a transparent look into the past."(Leilani 73) To prove this we can examine the photograph which is regarded as representation of truth and commonly taken as presenting a chunk of reality.

Kingston perceives the photograph as a two-edged weapon which "can attest to a personal or communal history of Chinese American presence, as well as contribute to an erasure of that presence in America. (Zackdonick 62) In *China Men* the status of the photograph as a piece of factual evidence is challenged and replaced by a view of the photograph as an interpretation of reality. An example of this is the picture that commemorates the construction of the railway. Ah Goong and his fellow Chinese laborers are the ones who built the railway and risked their lives to do so. Yet, they receive no credit for binding America with this important network. They do not appear in the picture celebrating and commemorating the completion of the railway, "While the demons posed for photographs, the

on the father and emphasize the multiplicity of perspectives. They convey that events could be seen or told in a hundred different ways. This feature is borrowed from the oral tradition from which Kingston drew her talk stories, for in oral literature there is no such thing as a fixed content because the content has no concrete existence; it is a fluid presence in the memory and neural system of those who heard the tales. In addition the story in the oral tradition always changes according to the teller and the listener. Competing versions of the past seem to stress the unreliability of the tales. In employing this tactic Kingston exhibits features of the migrant intellect which as Salman Rushdie states: "always roots itself in itself rather than in some objective reality ... regard[s] the world more as a construct or artifact than as the objective point of reference postulated by critics" (280).

Revising traditional notions of history that equate it with "fact" or "truth" and hold its accounts to be "objective" includes reviewing the position of the document, and of memory which is a key constituent of this notion of history, "documents themselves are seen as questionable, although

> China and my grandfather in San Francisco. She was good at sending. Or the men of those days had the power to have babies. If my grandfathers did no such wonders, my father nevertheless turned up in San Francisco an American citizen (237).

Here three contesting stories of the father's birth are offered. The first of them is plausible enough to be true, but it conflicts with the more detailed and lengthier version offered in the earlier chapter "The Father from China". The other two are obviously imaginary and mythic. The reader is thus confronted with four versions, each of which annuls the previous one and challenges its authority. This technique is used frequently in the course of the work. For example to account for the father's arrival in America two conflicting stories are offered. The first is about the father smuggling himself into the country nailed inside a crate; his sea voyage with all its hardships is graphically described. The other is about the father entering the country legally, getting detained and interrogated at the immigration station on Angel Island. The multiple stories bestow a legendary air

official history and present a balanced picture of the Chinese subject, instead of the reductive images offered by mainstream discourse. This approach makes the work a polyphonic text in which reality is not single but multiple. History is shown to be a matter of perspective; minority and majority voices speak, the centric as well as the ex-centric, the dominant and the marginal. No single discourse claims to be the authoritative discourse, not even the author's, because the very notion of authority itself and concepts of traditional history are being unsettled and deconstructed.

An important technique used by Kingston to unsettle the idea of any authoritative or final historical account is that of alternative histories. This technique is deployed in the stories of the male family figures. Often we find that more than one story is offered to explain how an event came about, and sometimes the stories are even conflicting and irreconcilable. Here is an example:

> In 1903 my father was born in San Francisco, where my grandmother had come disguised as a man. Or, Chinese women once magical, she gave birth at a distance, she in

According to law the Chinese were prohibited from owning land or real estate, testifying in court, or sending their children to public school. There were special taxes that no one else but the Chinese paid such as the fishing tax and the police tax. In addition, Chinese women were not admitted to the country and any American whether man or woman who married a Chinese lost his citizenship. This section testifies to the polyphonic nature of Kingston's novel. It represents the voice of official mainstream history. It is a factual account which is placed midway through the book to symbolize the centrality of dominant discourse. The writer subverts this mainstream voice by flanking it by the personal stories of the grandfathers which prove to be more "true" than the factual laws which reduce and dehumanize the Chinese. The Laws misrepresent and distort Chinese reality and past by treating the Chinese as if they are a subspecies. Leilani expounds that "Kingston questions and undermines the status of "truth" and "facts" by questioning the concepts of universality and objectivity." (73) The stories fill in what was left out by the exclusionary laws; they tell the stories of contribution left out by the annals of

family quest in *China Men,* the meaning of "home" for the men of the family gradually shifts from China to America" (486). Kingston's Americanness is stressed in the wish she expresses, "to compare China, a country I made up, with what country is really out there"(Pfaff 1). She stresses the Americanness of Chinese Americans when she says:

> We ought to leave out the hyphen in "Chinese-American" because the hyphen gives the word on either side an equal weight, as if linking two nouns ... Without the hyphen, "Chinese" is an adjective and "American" a noun, a Chinese American is a type of American (qtd. in Articulate Silences, Cheung 17).

"The Laws" is a ten-page length section devoted entirely to listing all the statutes and laws dealing with the Chinese from 1868- 1978. The information it provides is not commonly known to the average American. It cites the Exclusion Acts that restricted the entry of the Chinese for seventy years, the 1868 Law which drove out 40000 miners, and the 1870 law that denied naturalization to the Chinese.

'Remember you're not from Vietnam. Remember which side you're on. You're no gook from Vietnam"(286). The fact that he suffers racial discrimination and is prohibited from speaking at meals for the first five weeks associate the brother with great grandfather Bak Goong.

The brother's experiences during the war prove he is American and nothing else. Although "Chinese Americans talk about how when they set foot in China, even just Hong Kong, their whole lives suddenly made sense; their youth had been a preparation for this visit, they say … 'You find out what a China Man you are" (294), the brother's experience in Asia disproves these claims. When he takes a train tour, which included a trip to the border, a guide has to point China out to him. '"There's the People's Republic of China," said the guide'. If he had not said that, the brother would not have known"(302). China is described from his point of view as "the old planet his family had left light years ago."(294) An extended search for his relatives in Taiwan proves abortive despite thorough efforts on his part. This denotes that he should search for his roots in America, not China. Rabine observes that "in the course of the male

> Clearly, heroism in *China Men* is not defined by the conventional Chinese standards of masculine authority nor by Western standards of physical prowess. Kingston inverts the notion of masculinity and femininity in order to define heroism according to the standard of sheer survival of humiliating social and economic setbacks. (Sledge 8)

The sacrifices made by Chinese Americans are not a matter of the past. At the time of the Vietnam War, the narrator's brother who is a pacifist is faced with a choice between joining the navy to fight a war that runs against his principles, or leaving the country and living abroad as an exile. The second option seems impossible to him and, therefore, he reluctantly joins the Navy: "this brother decides to hold firm to his American identity, a birthright inherited from the toil and triumphs of his forbears" (Chua 67). In the army he suffers discrimination from his commanding officer who repeatedly asks him to say where he is from. He is singled out with this question which "... was a racial slur, all right, as though he were saying,

princesses. He also just looked at it, wondering what it was that it was for, what a man was for, what he had to have a penis for"(144). Linda Ching Sledge comments on the two ancestors, Bak Goong and Ah Goong, in the following manner:

> The two founding fathers in China Men, Bak Goong of the Hawiian Islands and Ah Goong of California, are prototypes of the family hero, fashioned in the image of the valiant, long-suffering Prometheus. Both are Cantonese "explorers and Americans" who pit themselves courageously against monumental natural obstacles to win at epic tests of manhood based not on lofty achievement so much as the endurance of great physical danger and psychological stress (8).

Kingston's talk stories about her ancestors are, in effect, records of their heroic achievements, but the concept of heroism undergoes a transformation:

soft. Our bones ought to be filled with iron" (134.) Despite the strenuous nature of the work, the railway company wants to increase the eight hour shift to ten hours, an unimaginable demand for the China Men, "a human body can't work like that. The demons don't believe this is a human body. This is a chinaman's body" (140). The unreasonable request was met actively by a strike on the part of the China Men. They used the slogan: "Eight hours a day good for white man, all the same good for China Man" (140).

Ah Goong is the relative whose psychological suffering the reader senses most. His loneliness and alienation drive him to spend the nights watching the sky, trying to spot the stars he knows from back home. "He felt his heart breaking of loneliness at so much blue-black space between star and star. The railroad he was building would not lead him to his family."(129) Ah Goong's sexual frustration is reflected in his acts of autoeroticism carried out while he is hanging in the air. At other times his pent up sexual energies lead him to feel despair: "he took out his penis under his blanket or bared it in the woods and thought about nurses and

heart of the earth. To make way for the railroad some of the cliffs that lie in its pathway have to be removed. Ah Goong's job as a basket man entailed being lowered from the tops of cliffs in a light wicker basket that swung and twirled in the wind to insert fuses and gunpowder between the rocks. If he fails to clear the explosion his fate would be like these two men:

> This time two men were blown up. One knocked out or killed by the explosion fell silently, the other screaming, his arms and legs struggling. A desire shot out of Ah Goong for an arm long enough to reach down and catch them … Ah Goong also wished that the conscious man would fall faster and get it over with (132).

Conversely, he sometimes has to work underground, like a mole, in order to dig tunnels in the unyielding granite of the mountains: "Ah Goong struck it with his pickax, and it jarred his bones, chattered his teeth. He swung his sledge hammer against it, and the impact rang in the dome of his skull" (134). This induced him to think that: "Skin was too

land sings. We heard something ... It's a tribute to the pioneers to have a living island named after their work hat ... I have heard the land sing ... I again search for my American ancestors by listening in the cane"(90). Thus, the labor of Chinese immigrants "was not simply a mode of survival but ultimately a method for owning a portion of America" (Nguyen 150). Kingston says in an interview: "When I say I am a native American with all the rights of an American. I am saying, "No, we're not outsiders. We Chinese belong here. This is our country, this is our history, we are a part of America. If it weren't for us America would be a different place" (qtd. in Linton 42).

Ah Goong, "The Grand Father of the Sierra Nevada Mountains", is another representative of the valiant forefathers. When he comes to America, he is set Herculean tasks. One time he is asked to fell down a gigantic tree: "He circled the tree. How to attack it? No side looked like the side made to be cut, nor did any ground seem the place for it to fall"(128). At a later stage he finds employment with the railroad company. His job is a highly dangerous one, requiring him by turns to dangle in the air or delve into the

have shaved off my hair and become a monk. Apparently, we've taken a vow of chastity too. Nothing but roosters in this flock' (100).

Here Bak Goong points to the deprivation from which China Men suffered, for they were not allowed to bring their wives to America. At the same time there were anti-miscegenation laws that prevented the marriage of Chinese and whites. Therefore, China Men lived in a state of enforced bachelorhood, even those among them who were married. Bak Goong's resourcefulness and indomitable will make him resist the silence rule. He is fined then whipped, but still refuses to shut up. He ingenuously devises a cough language to disguise his words then finally succeeds in getting the silence rule revoked. The character of this Chinese forefather challenges the stereotype of the Chinese as passive, obedient, and submissive.

The labor of Bak Goong and his fellow China Men does not go in vain. When his narrator grand-daughter visits Hawaii, she sees an island that was named after them "Chinaman's Hat". The land itself is not silent, "It was, I know it, the island, the voice of the island singing…But the

> tangle of trees so thick that they shut out sunlight ... Beginning anywhere, Bak Goong chopped into the edge of this strange forest. He could not take hold of the branches because of the thorns on them. Dust shook down. Coughing, alarmed at how quickly he grew hot, tired, and thirsty in the intervals between-the water- and-tea man's round he shook a silver ball from the flat glass bottle he carried in his pocket and swallowed it for thirst. Though he chopped, hacked, and sawed with all his might, the knot of trees did not seem smaller. Black birds with flashes of white wings flew easily straight through the maze" (98).

Bak Goong is reduced to a slave-like existence. A tab is strung around his neck to identify him and he is forbidden from speaking during working hours:

> This rule was so absurd he thought he must have misheard ... He needed to cast his voice out to catch ideas. I wasn't born to be silent like a monk, he thought, then promptly said. 'If I knew I had to take a vow of silence', he added, 'I would

Kingston uses the private histories of her family members to lay claim to America. She shows their contribution and sacrifices which prove that they have a stake in America. “What I am doing in this new book is claiming America … which goes all the way from one character saying that a Chinese explorer found this place before Leif Eriksson did to another one buying a house here” (Pfaff 1980,1).

The chapter titled “The Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains” chronicles the journey of the great grandfather to the Gold Mountain. The recruiter tells him he would work in the sugarcane plantations, sleep comfortably in a dormitory, and return home with riches after only three years. After undertaking the arduous journey to America, he discovers the falseness of these promises: “There was no farm, no sugarcane ready to tend. It was their job to hack a farm out of the wilderness which they were to level from the ocean to the mountain”(98). To those who regard China Men as only capable of domestic work, Kingston offers the example of Bak Goong’s arduous toil. He is confronted by a:

Kingston's version of history rejects the authoritative voice of official history, and opts for the style of Chinese talk stories which are short popular tales that form a part of the oral tradition. Kingston uses, "a fluid style of tales which manages to instruct without being overtly didactic."(Wu 90). She also benefits from the talk book from which she adopts, "a magical technique for combining the fictive with the historical" (Wu 91). The major example of it is Sima Qian's *Historical Records* which: "presents some three thousand years of Chinese history in the form of biographical tales with fictive elements" (Wu 93).

Thus, Kingston problematizes the existent notion of history. Typically history and fiction are seen as separate genres; the domain of history being fact, and that of fiction being the imagination. Kingston conflates the two and "revises notions of what makes an experience historical by asking by what standards we decide what can enter into history and the public realm"(Leilani 73). She intermingles the objective, the factual, and the impersonal with the personalized, the private and the subjective.

a type or generic forefather whose story is representative of many Chinese American immigrants."(74). Li holds that: "Kingston's quest for her fathers—the collective Chinese ancestry submerged in American history as opposed to a single family genealogy is unmistakable" (487).

Conventional notions of history as a written record, a public account are here being unsettled, deconstructed. Kingston mingles oral history; or stories told her by relatives that had come down through generations (i.e. biographical accounts) with fables, myths, Chinese folklore and fairy tales to offer a richer and truer account than one that would stop at mere facts. She creates a hybrid work that can be described as "a mythic history of Post-Civil War America" that constitutes an "attempt to intervene in and undermine a 'master narrative' of history and identity in America"(Leilani 72). By writing this history, Kingston is "gaining the center for a positional "other" and bringing into light … what has been previously hidden or unknown about Chinese Americans." She also provides "an intense examination of traditional perspectives on them" (Li 493).

are not about heroes or great political figures, but about simple average people who despite being members of the minority had a role to play; a contribution to make. Their private family history stands in contrast to the public history which excludes the immigrants. At long last, their voices can be heard, their stories known, and their desires and frustrations sensed: "Kingston contrasts the "private" (read: non-representative and therefore non-historical) stories of the "Grand Fathers" to the official public (read: objective and historical documents of the time)" (Leilani 73). It would not, however, be completely correct to consider that Kingston is writing only about her family. Those family figures stand for many others, which explains why they are left nameless. Although the labels describing them, "BaBa", "Ah Goong", and "Bak Goong" may seem like proper nouns, they, in fact, mean no more than "Father", "Grandfather", and "Great Grandfather". The family figures are not personalized because they stand as prototypes for a host of similar human beings. Leilani states that: "While the grandfathers are individual people with their own personalities and personal histories, they also are

Equally if not more important is Kingston's strategy of historical revision which involves: "simultaneous deconstructing and problematizing of available versions of Chinese American history and history making" (Ling 323). Official American history which is taught in school books and seen in documentaries asserts that America is the product of white Anglo-Saxon culture. This means that all the efforts of non-Anglos and minorities are erased. Kingston's work seems to imply that these assumptions are not to be accepted wholeheartedly and without questioning. We must ask whether these claims are true or not. Were there no contributions made to the American nation by non-whites or are these allegations the product of racist ideologies? Is history synonymous with truth and fact, or is it a matter of interpretation? Would the telling of history differ depending on whether the teller represents the dominant system or not? Can there be alternative versions of history where the subaltern speaks, or not?

The first step taken by Kingston in this direction is to tell her own family history: to give the personal accounts of her father, grandfather, and great grandfather. These talk stories

Kingston's transformation of myths and classics was regarded as ignorance of Chinese myth and considered pernicious as it distorts these myths and offers an inaccurate picture of Chinese culture to the western reader. Kingston, however, rejects regarding myth as sacred and untouchable. Myths to her are changing and ever growing,

> Sinologists have criticized me for not knowing myths and for distorting them. They don't understand that myths have to change, be useful or be forgotten. Like the people who carry them across oceans, the myths become American are new, American (qtd. in Semiotics of China, Yuan 302).

The myths and fables are placed at the beginnings and ends of the six main chapters. They are intertexts that have a dialogical relationship to the main text as they speak to, subvert, or contest the main chapters. The intermingling of Western and Eastern codes; Chinese and Western elements serves to blur boundaries and challenge binary schema. By fusing these elements the writer conveys that their separateness and distinctness is constructed not inherent.

which is no other than that of King Midas. After listening to the tale, they act like the king. They go to the fields, and proceed to plough the land. After they make a big hole, they lie on the ground face downwards and shout all their secrets and troubles into the hole. They send greetings to their families, telling them they miss them, giving them their news. But most importantly they give vent to their feelings of exile and alienation: "I want home', Bak Goong yelled, pressed against the soil and smelling the earth, ' I want my home,' the men yelled together. 'I want home. Home. Home. Home. Home" (117). Acting out this drama rids the men of all their pent up feelings, but more importantly, it revokes the silence rule. Their weird behavior scares the overseers who do not know what they are up to and, therefore leave them alone. By digging the ground and burying their secrets into it, these men are striking roots into the new land, thereby making it their home. Bak Goong says: "That wasn't a custom ... We made it up. We can make up customs because we're the founding ancestors of this place" (118).

unlikely to question the premises of the story; or to see Robinson's activities as exploitative, dehumanizing and unjust. Li comments that:

> Kingston's creative reproduction of the Robinson myth lays bare the device that rationalizes almost all Western colonization, the workings of language and culture that presuppose the inherent supremacy of European civilization and the barbarous wretchedness of the native (489).

Another act of cultural transformation pertains to the story of King Midas first told by Ovid and retold by Chaucer in his "Wife of Bath". This story is incorporated into the chapter of "The Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains". Bak Goong's problem arises from the fact that his white bosses have issued a rule prohibiting him and his fellow agricultural laborers from speaking while working. Bak Goong not only holds the rule to be unjust and dehumanizing, but also considers it the cause of the strange and unexplainable illness that attacks the men. He cures the men by telling them a story they knew from back home

which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief' (140). It is a form of ritual enacted and repeated in daily life. This ritual is encoded with social meanings and serves to constitute the gendered subject and maintain gender binarism.

Cultural revision in *China Men* is not restricted to Chinese classics, but extends also to works from the Western canon. For example, the section entitled "The Adventures of Lo Bun Sun" is a retelling of *Robinson Crusoe*. It presents the story of a castaway who lives on a solitary island and has the same adventures as Crusoe. Phonetically the name Lo Bun Sun resembles the English name Robinson and like him he takes a slave whom he calls Sing Kay No, which is Friday in Cantonese. Kingston chooses to retell a colonialist text while giving it a racist masculinist white imperialist hero in order to subvert it. In sinicizing the tale, she takes it out of its familiar white European context, thus leading the reader to question the racist and colonialist ideology upon which it is based. Without this process of defamiliarization, the reader is

worked as a laundry man. In the original romance it was not Tang Ao, the scholar, but his merchant brother-in-law who was captured and feminized. Kingston performs textual revision in order to give a biographical twist to the tale. According to Li's interpretation the episode tackles the key American issues of "the right of discovery and the right of possession"(484). He detects in it a retracing of origin, claiming that: "Kingston's myth of America dispenses with the Judeo-Christian typology and its secularized variations. Kingston instead finds an affiliative order in Chinese mythology" (485).

The tale also reveals Kingston's feminist leanings as Tang Ao's transfomation is an oblique comment on the injustices that the patriarchal system inflicts on women. The inversion of sex roles concurs with Judith Butler's theory about the performativity of gender: "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (140). Butler perceives gender as: "constructed identity, a performative accomplishment

Chinese classic *Flowers in the Mirror* written by Li Ruzhen. According to Kingston it is the story of Tang Ao, a scholar who while traveling comes upon the Land of Women where he is captured by the women who make some changes in him to fit him to meet the queen. Consequently, his eyebrows are plucked, his ears pierced, and his feet bound. On the appointed day the women powder Tang Ao and paint his cheeks and lips red then take him to court where he serves the banquet. There he walks swaying his hips and shoulders as a result of his shaped feet, while the guests ogle him and comment on his prettiness.

Although the connection of this episode to a work that claims America for the Chinese is not immediately apparent, closer scrutiny reveals that the story of Tang Ao is meant to comment on the "emasculation" of the Chinese American male during the nineteenth and twentieth century. This is evidenced by a footnote supplementing the story that states that some scholars locate the Land of Women in North America. The allusion becomes more pertinent when we find out that Kingston's father, BaBa in the book, was a scholar in China, but when he immigrated to America he

culture"(484). The title, in my view, is a gesture of self-assertion, because the hyphenated writer is flaunting her Chinese heritage instead of seeking to align herself with mainstream culture as a means of escaping racism and bias, as many minority writers do. As a tribute to her ancestors she, for once, gains the center for those human beings who lived and died at the margin.

China Men is a work which resists classification into any single genre. It is a combination of autobiography, history, fiction, myth, fable, legend, biography, folklore, and talk story. Its first vignette which is titled "On Discovery" is an instance of the technique of cultural revision that Kingston uses to comment on the situation of Chinese Americans and the effects of racism, and to recuperate a lost Chinese American history. This technique which is used repeatedly by Kingston was also employed in her earlier work which came to be a classic of Chinese American literature, *The Woman Warrior*. Cultural revisioning involves the retelling of myths, legends and popular tales while working transformations on them. In "On Discovery" Kingston retells a popular tale taken from the nineteenth century

her work which celebrates the lives and contributions of her fathers, but only after she transforms both its form and meaning. The adjective "chinaman" is replaced by two nouns "China" and "Men", both of which are written in capitals in order to confer status on the Chinese men. Moreover, the title in this form is an exact or literal translation of the descriptor "Chinese" in the Chinese language. Being a translation, the term rings un-English, which in my view is a calculated gesture on Kingston's part. Furthermore, the writer adds on the title page the ideograph for the word "Chinese". In this manner she creates a dialogic title that plays off two languages and two cultures against each other and metamorphoses a pejorative term into another that expresses ethnic pride, because these originally marginal China Men become the heroes of her story. The Chinese ideograph is one way of denoting that it is not only those of Chinese ancestry who have to accommodate American culture, but that similarly American readers also have to accommodate Chinese culture. In David Leiwei Li's view, the title, "pinpoints at once its claim on the American language and its self indication in the multiethnic American

Maxine Hong Kingston undertakes the same task as Chin, but she uses different techniques. To rectify the distorted image of Asian American manhood, she employs cultural revision, historical revision, and the Chinese tradition of talk story. The work she creates is, to use Bhakhtinian phraseology, "polyphonic", for "it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio–ideological groups in the present, between tendencies ... circles and so forth" (Bakhtin 291). Kingston produces a counternarrative that speaks for the marginal without excluding the mainstream, and provides a discourse that incorporates both the centric and the excentric, using different languages and offering contesting voices and worldviews.

The first step towards polyphony is the title of the work which manifests interplay between two languages: the English and the Chinese. "China Men" is a term coined by Kingston herself and derived from "chinaman" the derogative label traditionally used to describe and address men from China. Kingston chooses this term as a title for

> and its collective memory. For Asian Americans as a racial minority in the US, literature and the acts of reading, writing, and producing it become highly charged political acts regardless of authorial intention (148).

Chin and his collaborators seek to achieve their aim of remasculinizing the Asian man by evoking an Asian heroic tradition and by presenting warrior heroes from Chinese and Japanese epics. In doing so, however, these writers, surprisingly, invoke a code of violence, although they had previously been victims of violence. They set out to recast the Asian man in an image harmonious with that of the strong American male projected in Westerns and other cultural media. This trend has triggered the censure of critics like King-Kok Cheung and Viet Thanh Nguyen who acknowledge the commendability of their aims, but disapprove of the means deployed to carry them out. Cheung views this trend as "problematic" because of its "unthinking resuscitation of manly codes that require violence" (Of Men and Men, Cheung 177).

> and instead of being graceful like Fu in flowing robes, he is awkward in a baggy suit and clumsy … [He does] not smoke, drink, womanize … He never gets into violent things (Chin and Chan 60).

This view of the Asian as asexual is partly the result of the involvement of Asian men in domestic work, performing the jobs of restaurant workers, cooks, waiters, houseboys, and laundry workers. Due to bias, the racial majority that created and perpetuated these stereotypes never bothered to search into the reasons that lead Asians into this line of work. It remained for Asian writers to investigate the injustices leveled against Asians and to attempt to rectify stereotypical and reductive images of them.

Several attempts were made to alter these negative stereotypes; the most prominent of which is that undertaken by Frank Chin the author of the much debated The Big Aiiieeee. Viet Thanh Nguyen comments:

> Through writing, Asian Americans seek to counter their exclusion from American society

> An often cited contemporary variation of feminization is the mass media's projection of their [Asians] collective image as a model minority, a term that distinguished Asian Americans from blacks, Hispanics, and native Americans during the political ferment of the 1960's because the latter's back-talking militancy is typically viewed as a sign of male potency (315).

Not only do cultural stereotypes perceive Asians as passive, but they also see them as lacking in sexual rigor. This is obvious in the two common stereotypes of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan (both of whom are morally dismissible; one being villainous, the other buffoonish):

> Dr. Fu, a man wearing, a long dress, batting his eyelashes, surrounded by muscular black servants in loin cloths, and with his habit of caressingly touching white men on the leg, wrist, and face with his long fingernails is not so much a threat as he is frivolous offense to white manhood. Chan's gestures are the same, except he doesn't touch,

the Westerner more Western-- and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies (45-46).

The alienisation of Asians was attended, moreover, by labor exploitation and legal exclusion. They became "coolie laborers" undertaking the menial jobs that the whites scorned. The immigrants suffered from physical exclusion evidenced by their aggregation in China towns, as well as from the exclusion of their cultural presence and visibility. The voice of the minority, society's "other" was barred. Bias is clear not only in derogative epithets such as "chink" and "gook" applied to this minority, but even in labels that ostensibly praise it. For example, in recent decades the term "model minority" has emerged to describe the Asian minority and set it up as an example to be emulated by other minorities. Although on the surface the term seems laudatory, in reality, it serves to confirm and perpetuate the racial stereotypes about Asians, since it emerges from the interpretation of Asians as quiet, obedient, and politically passive. This is confirmed by Jinqi Ling:

as persons, and populations to be integrated into the national political sphere, and as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins. "Asia" has always been a complex site upon which the manifold anxieties of the United States nation-state have been figured; such anxieties have both figured Asian countries as exotic, barbaric, and alien, and Asian laborers immigrating to the United States from the nineteenth century onward as a "yellow peril" threatening to displace white European immigrants" (Lowe 7).

Of course the dangers of the polarization of East and West have been amply admonished against by Edward Said who condemns the standardization and cultural stereotyping of the Orient:

When one uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end points of analysis … the result is usually to polarize the distinction – the Oriental becoming more Oriental,

> consigned to oblivion. (Articulate Silences, Cheung 10).

The notion of "emasculation" is a result of the binary schema that associates the "male" concept with assertiveness, power, and voice, and the "female" principle with passivity, submissiveness, and silence. As the Asian male immigrants were subjected to an enforced invisibility, they were regarded as having been reduced to a feminized entity. The bias and sexism of such binary logic are self-evident. Explicating them does not mean the present writer subscribes to this binary logic, but is only using a term commonly employed in Asian American studies. The disempowerment of Asians can be explained by the fact that Asia was always regarded as Europe's other; and hence Asian immigrants were regarded as the "other", or the aliens against whom American national identity could be defined. Lisa Lowe argues that:

> In the last century and a half, the American citizen has been defined over against the Asian immigrant, legally, economically, and culturally. These definitions have cast Asian immigrants both

hyphenated Americans by an oppressive culture and a synonym for their economic and political subordination.

"Emasculation" takes many forms. One of them is the speechlessness manifested in a dual silence by and about immigrants. On the one hand, the immigrants themselves were secretive and reticent in speaking about themselves and their histories. The narrator in the autobiographical narrative, *China* Men, comments on her father's muteness in the following words, "No stories. No past. No China"(14). The immigrants' speechlessness was the result of prevailing racism against them as well as fear of deportation. Thus the past is obliterated in favor of safety and also to help the new generation start in the new country unhampered by any burdens from the past. At the same time there is silence on the part of the nation about Asian Americans noted in their absence from cultural and historical narratives:

> The obliteration of the Asian past was not compensated for by presence in America i.e. recognition in their new home. Immigrants found their "presence" annulled by legalized discrimination and their contributions



Sharing America Reinstating Chinese American Masculinity in Maxine Hong Kingston's China Men

Dr. Maha Hassan (*)

Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* (1980) is a quest for her fathers; a work that seeks to reinstate Chinese Americans in their rightful place in American history as co-owners of the United States. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Chinese Americans were deprived of this rightful status due to a phenomenon known in Asian American studies as "emasculation". This term which is a key concept in Asian American Studies, is used to describe the loss of power and position from which Chinese immigrants to the United States suffered. It is a metaphor for the victimization of these

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